

[By David Delcore, Barre Montpelier Times Argus](#)

Most Vermonters are preparing to test their consumption of turkey, though a surprising number – "one in 20" – don't necessarily know where their next meal is coming from.

With Thanksgiving just around the corner Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., delivered that sobering finding while standing in the food-filled warehouse of the Vermont Foodbank on Monday.

"That's very alarming news," Welch said, citing the findings of a recent survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

According to Welch, that study determined Vermont is the "sixth hungriest state in the nation" and found that a stunning one out of every 20 Vermonters is defined as "severely hungry."

"They're on the edge of not getting the nutrition they need to sustain themselves and remain healthy," he said, a condition that is both unacceptable and understandable.

"We live in an economy now where the danger of falling off being able to provide for the basic necessity of food is very real," he said.

Welch, who dropped by the Foodbank to volunteer, said he hoped his visit would attract attention to a problem that too often escapes notice.

"Hunger is often times invisible," he said. "You don't see it, you don't experience it until you go to the Foodbank and see these families coming in desperately in need of the service and the food and the nutrition that's being provided here."

Welch, who is a co-sponsor of the Road Map to End Global Hunger – a multi-year effort to streamline federal food assistance programs – said low-income Vermonters can expect more

immediate help in the form of additional food subsidies that are part of the economic recovery act. He said those who receive food stamps can expect an additional \$80 a month.

"In a tight, tight budget that's real money that makes a real difference in the calories their kids can consume," he said.

Flanked by shelves stacked to the warehouse ceiling with baby food, bottled water, beans and brown rice, Welch said he hoped highlighting the issue of food insecurity would help.

"Getting the focus and the attention on the problem is essential to address the problem," he said.

John Sayles, chief executive officer of the Vermont Foodbank, said the organization that supplies food to 280 food shelves, soup kitchens and senior centers around the state will take all the help it can get.

"The need is growing," he said citing a 35-40 percent increase in demand this year.

That's a big deal for an organization that distributed 7.5 million pounds of food last year – up 1 million pounds from the previous year.

Given the economic realities that suggest those most in need are the last to shake off the effects of a recession, Sayles predicted those numbers should continue to rise.

"We're going to be seeing an increase in need over the next couple of years as the economy starts to recover," he said.

Marissa Parisi, executive director of the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, echoed

that assessment.

"The increase in need is demanding an increase in resources," she said, suggesting the USDA report paints an unflattering portrait of a state another recent survey recognized as the healthiest in the nation.

"We need to do more outreach to hungry families across the state to take advantage of available food programs and to expand programs so that they are available to all who need them," she said. "Hunger is an injustice that should not exist in this country and should not exist in this state."